

ON FILE ~~SECRET~~WASHINGTON TIMES  
27 January 1987

# Aides claim Aquino was trying to fool U.S.

By Tom Breen  
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

MANILA — Philippine government officials said yesterday that private telephone conversations in which President Corazon Aquino suggested tampering with the drafting of a new constitution had been staged to mislead U.S. eavesdroppers.

Executive Secretary Joker Arroyo and presidential adviser Rene Saguisag acknowledged the existence of tapes and transcripts of the conversations, in which Mrs. Aquino and her top aides discussed ways to alleviate U.S. concerns about a constitutional provision barring nuclear-powered ships from the giant American naval base at Subic Bay.

But they made the extraordinary claim that the conversations were fabricated for "American consumption." They added that neither Mrs. Aquino nor her aides had any intention to influence the shaping of the constitution, but wanted the Americans to believe the Aquino government was working on behalf of U.S. interests.

Their admission that such telephone conversations had taken place — and an explanation that few are likely to believe — sent shock waves through Manila's huge diplomatic community and is certain to cast a long shadow over the credibility of Mrs. Aquino's 11-month-old government.

Mrs. Aquino has repeatedly accused ex-President Ferdinand Marcos of interfering in the drafting of the 1973 constitution, which she scrapped shortly after becoming president in February, while disputing opposition charges that she too is interfering in the drafting of a new one.

The tapes and transcripts of the conversations were released last Friday by oppositionist Homobono Adaza, a disgruntled former ally of the president, in an apparent attempt to embarrass her.

The phone conversations took place on Sept. 19 during Mrs. Aquino's visit to the United States. Washington was then considering a major increase in U.S. aid to the Philippines, but American officials were voicing deep concern over a potential constitutional provision to ban nuclear weapons from the archipelago.

The United States was opposed to such a ban because it would prohibit Amer-

ican nuclear-powered and nuclear-equipped ships from docking at the U.S. naval installation at Subic Bay north of here.

Mr. Arroyo was speaking from his home in Manila and Mrs. Aquino was at a Washington hotel. With her were Mr. Saguisag and Information Minister Teodoro Locsin.

During the conversations, Mrs. Aquino and the others talked freely about the possibility of phoning one of the constitutional commissioners and getting him to soften the anti-nuclear provision. Such a provision was eventually included

in the draft charter, but in a vaguely worded and watered-down form unlikely to impede the movement of U.S. ships in Philippine waters.

Messrs. Arroyo and Saguisag both said they had initially believed the conversations were being bugged by the CIA in Washington, which is why they were "fabricated" to make the president sound pro-American. They said they subsequently learned that Mr. Arroyo's phone had been tapped and the conversations recorded illegally by "unknown persons" in the Philippines.

The two officials suggested that former Defense Minister Juan Ponce Enrile may have been involved in the phone tap. Mr. Enrile had no immediate comment on the allegation.

Both Aquino officials expressed outrage that a private phone conversation with the president had been tapped. Mr. Saguisag said "part of the enjoyment of life" was being able to say anything one pleases during private phone conversations.

"Are we living in 1984?" he asked rhetorically. "Are they eavesdropping on all of us?"